United Nations A/54/7/Add.12

General Assembly

Distr.: General
15 March 2000

Original: English

Fifty-fourth session
Agenda item 121
Proposed programme budget for the biennium 2000-2001

Review and assessment of the asbestos problem at the United Nations: management of asbestos-containing materials at the United Nations Headquarters buildings

Report of the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions

1. The Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions has considered the report of the Secretary-General on the asbestos problem at the United Nations Headquarters buildings. The present report is submitted in accordance with General Assembly resolution 54/249 of 22 December 1999, paragraph 187, in which the Assembly requested the Secretary-General to submit to it during its fifty-fourth session a detailed and comprehensive report addressing the asbestos problem. During its consideration of the report, the Committee met with representatives of the Secretary-General who provided additional information.

2. The Committee notes from section III of the report of the Secretary-General (A/54/779) that the document covers the United Nations Headquarters buildings, the UNDC-I and UNDC-II buildings, the former UNITAR building and leased spaces in other buildings in New York. The Committee notes that the report does not cover buildings at Geneva, Vienna, Nairobi or the locations of the regional commissions since that was not requested in the above-mentioned resolution.

3. In connection with the buildings at the United Nations Headquarters complex, the Committee notes from paragraph 11 of the report that asbestos-containing materials were extensively used as the buildings were constructed in the early 1950s, when the use of asbestos was widespread. Upon enquiry, the Committee was informed that since measures to manage asbestos started at United Nations Headquarters, 30 per cent of the asbestos has been removed from the buildings. The Committee was also informed that with regard to the UNITAR building, 70 per cent of the asbestos has been removed and the remaining 30 per cent remain encapsulated, mainly on the ground floor.

4. The Committee notes from paragraphs 17 and 31 of the report of the Secretary-General that it is not possible to remove all the asbestos-containing materials from the United Nations Headquarters buildings without vacating and isolating multiple floors and that this would be undertaken in the context of implementing the capital master plan for extensive renovation of the United Nations Headquarters buildings which is to be presented to the legislative bodies in 2000, as and when funding for such a plan has been approved.

5. With regard to current measures for the management of asbestos, the Committee notes from section VI of the report of the Secretary-General that these include continued encapsulation of the existing

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asbestos, whereby it poses no health risk to staff, delegates or visitors; semi-annual testing of all air supply and return sources for presence of any asbestos fibres; and the removal of asbestos-containing materials only where the maintenance, alterations, improvement, construction or other activity necessitates its removal. The Committee was informed that all handling of asbestos had followed standard procedures and unacceptable levels had not entered the air stream.

6. Upon enquiry, the Committee was informed that between 14 and 15 complaints concerning asbestos are received every year. On receiving a complaint from staff, a licensed independent contractor is sent to test the area for the presence of any asbestos fibres and the results are made available to staff through the Medical Services Division. Investigation of past complaints have not led to a positive finding of asbestos fibres in the air stream.

7. As indicated in paragraph 28 of the report of the Secretary-General, for the 2000-2001 biennium the amount of $1 million has been budgeted for the management of asbestos at United Nations Headquarters. Upon enquiry, the Committee was informed that since this programme started, $1 million has been budgeted every biennium and expenditures have ranged from $250,000 to $500,000 per year.

8. The Committee recommends that the General Assembly take note of the report of the Secretary-General and that information be provided on buildings at Geneva, Vienna, Nairobi and the locations of the regional commissions.

United Nations A/54/7/Add.13

General Assembly

Distr.: General
17 March 2000

Original: English

Fifty-fourth session
Agenda item 121
Programme budget for the biennium 2000-2001

Review of the resource requirements for the High-Level Intergovernmental Event for Financing for Development and the Third United Nations Conference on the Least Developed Countries

Report of the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions

1. The Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions has considered the note by the Secretary-General, contained in document A/C.5/54/50, on the review of the resource requirements for the High-Level Intergovernmental Event for Financing for Development and the Third United Nations Conference on the Least Developed Countries, as requested by the General Assembly in paragraph 104 of section IV of its resolution 54/249 of 23 December 1999. During its consideration of the matter, the Committee met with representatives of the Secretary-General, who provided additional information.

2. The Committee notes that, regarding the High-Level Intergovernmental Event, the Secretary-General proposes to revert to this matter, after clarification and outcome of the consultations described in paragraph 2 of A/C.5/54/50, when he will be in a better position to address the resource requirements issue. **The Committee agrees with this proposal.**

3. Regarding the Third United Nations Conference on the Least Developed Countries, the Committee notes that the Second Committee, at its 49th meeting, on 14 December 1999, adopted draft resolution A/C.2/54/L.73 by consensus. A statement of programme budget implications, contained in document A/C.2/54/L.74, was before the Committee. The report of the Second Committee to the General Assembly, recommending the adoption of resolution A/C.2/54/L.73, is contained in document A/54/587/Add.6.

4. As indicated in its first report on the proposed programme budget for the biennium 2000-2001 (A/54/7, para. 66) the Advisory Committee reiterates its concern over the continued practice of some intergovernmental bodies of attempting to determine the method of financing of mandates to be approved in the context of substantive resolutions, in contravention of the provisions of General Assembly resolutions 41/213 of 19 December 1986 and 42/211 of 21 December 1987, and recalls the spirit and the letter of section VI of Assembly resolution 45/248 B of 21 December 1990, which reaffirmed that the Fifth Committee is the appropriate Main Committee of the General Assembly entrusted with the responsibility for administrative and budgetary matters and the role of the Advisory Committee, and expressed concern at the tendency of substantive Committees and

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other intergovernmental bodies to involve themselves in administrative and budgetary matters.

5. The Advisory Committee notes that the Fifth Committee, at its 48th and 50th meetings, on 17 and 23 December 1999, considered the programme budget implications contained in A/C.5/54/43 and decided to inform the General Assembly (see A/54/693) that, should it adopt draft resolution A/C.2/54/L.73 contained in the report of the Second Committee (A/54/587/Add.6), additional requirements of $646,400 would arise in the proposed programme budget for the biennium 2000-2001, under section 11A, Trade and development ($616,400) and section 26, Public information ($30,000). These resources would represent a charge against the contingency fund and would be considered in the context of the proposed programme budget for the biennium 2000-2001.

6. The Advisory Committee notes that the General Assembly, in adopting resolution 54/235 of 23 December 1999, also approved additional resources of $646,400 in the manner mentioned in paragraph 5 above (see A/54/691, para. 14, summary table, section 11A.III. and section 26.III.(b)).

7. The Advisory Committee also notes further that, in paragraph 14 of resolution 54/235, the General Assembly decided to defray the cost of participation of two government representatives from each least developed country in the meetings of the preparatory committee and the conference itself (estimated at $1,164,500 and $500,500, respectively, in A/C.5/54/43) through the use of extrabudgetary resources. In the event that those prove insufficient, it requested the Secretary-General to consider all other options, including the use of unspent balances from the regular budget for the biennium 1996-1997 as an exceptional measure.

8. The Advisory Committee recalls that, in paragraph 7 of its report contained in A/54/7/Add.3, it had recommended that, on an exceptional basis, the special account be maintained and the unspent balance retained until all the activities and programmes outlined in the report of the Secretary-General of 13 May 1998 (A/52/898 and Corr.1) and approved by the General Assembly in its resolution 53/3 of 12 October 1998 were completed. The Fifth Committee agreed with this recommendation (A/54/691, paras. 45 and 46). Upon inquiry, the Committee was informed that no further expert group meetings had been convened since the issuance of the report of the Secretary-General of 26 October 1999 (A/54/501), and that the actual unspent balance amounted to $587,712, as at 31 December 1999.

9. The Advisory Committee was also informed that no response has been received as yet to the note verbale sent by the secretariat of the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) to all its States members, inviting them to consider the provision of voluntary contributions to defray the costs mentioned in paragraph 7 above. However, a contribution of two million Finnish marks ($338,764) has been received from the Government of Finland, which has been allocated to supporting the country-level preparatory process for the Third United Nations Conference on Least Developed Countries. Given the fact that the preparatory process for the Conference is under way, a major part has already been obligated for those purposes.

10. **The Advisory Committee notes that it is still early to predict the outcome of the appeal. It recommends, therefore, that the Secretary-General further inform the General Assembly in the context of its second resumed fifty-fourth session on the status of voluntary contributions received.** As indicated in the note of the Secretary-General (A/C.5/54/50, para. 8), an amount of $582,000 would be required to defray the costs of the representatives of the least developed countries to the first session of the Preparatory Committee, to be held in July 2000. ***Moreover, the Committee notes and agrees with the proposal that, should there continue to be a shortfall in the availability of extrabudgetary resources for the second preparatory meeting and the Conference itself, the Secretary-General would bring that situation to the attention of the Assembly for appropriate action in the context of its fifty-fifth session.***